Research - Fuzzing Cryptographic Ledger Implementations: Robustness Analysis of Chain Verification

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2026

Abstract

Cryptographic ledger implementations must handle maliciously crafted inputs that probe for vulnerabilities in parsing, validation, and verification logic. This paper presents a comprehensive fuzzing methodology for hash-chained cryptographic ledgers, applied to the AIOSS (AI Open Signed Storage) format. We conduct a systematic robustness analysis of chain verification logic using coverage-guided fuzzing, differential fuzzing against a reference implementation, and structure-aware fuzzing with format-specific mutators. Our methodology encompasses three fuzzing targets: the binary (.aioss) format parser, the JSON format parser, and the hash chain verification engine. Over 10,000 CPU-hours of fuzzing across these targets, we discovered 47 distinct defects, including 3 critical memory safety violations, 12 logic errors in state transition validation, 8 denial-of-service vectors, and 24 edge cases in compliance framework encoding. We present a taxonomy of discovered vulnerability classes, provide detailed crash analysis for each critical defect, and evaluate the effectiveness of different fuzzing strategies. Our results show that structure-aware fuzzing—where mutators operate on the AST representation rather than raw bytes—achieves 34% higher code coverage and discovers 2.1× more defects per CPU hour compared to blind byte-level mutation. We further demonstrate that combining coverage-guided fuzzing with property-based oracles—where fuzzer-generated inputs are validated against fo

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Document ID: AIOSS-RES-016-001 **Version:** 1.0.0 **Date:** 2026-06-20 **Classification:** Academic Research

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1. Introduction

Cryptographic ledger implementations occupy a unique position in the software security landscape. They process potentially untrusted input (ledger files received from external parties), perform cryptographic verification (hash chain validation, signature verification), and produce security-critical outputs (audit verdicts, compliance reports) [1]. A vulnerability in ledger verification logic can lead to undetected tampering, forged audit trails, or denial of service against auditing infrastructure [2].

Fuzz testing—the practice of providing unexpected or malformed inputs to a program and monitoring for crashes, hangs, or invariant violations—has proven remarkably effective at discovering vulnerabilities in software that processes complex input formats [3]. The application of fuzzing to cryptographic ledger implementations, however, presents unique challenges: the input space is large and structured, the validation logic is complex, and the correctness requirements are absolute [4].

This paper addresses these challenges through a systematic, multi-target fuzzing methodology for the AIOSS ledger format. We combine three complementary fuzzing approaches: coverage-guided fuzzing for exploring the input space, differential fuzzing for detecting semantic discrepancies, and structure-aware fuzzing for generating format-valid but logic-invalid inputs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foundations of Fuzz Testing

The term "fuzz testing" was coined by Miller et al. in 1990, who demonstrated that feeding random inputs to Unix utilities caused crashes in 25-33% of programs [5]. This foundational work established the principle that random input testing could reliably discover defects in production software. Subsequent work by Forrester and Miller extended this analysis to Windows applications, finding similar crash rates [6].

2.2 Coverage-Guided Fuzzing

The development of coverage-guided fuzzing, pioneered by Zalewski's American Fuzzy Lop (AFL), represented a paradigm shift [7]. By instrumenting the target program to track which code paths are exercised by each input, and by using genetic algorithms to mutate inputs toward unexplored paths, AFL dramatically improved the efficiency of fuzzing [8]. The LibFuzzer library, part of the LLVM project, provides an in-process fuzzing engine that integrates coverage instrumentation with a mutation-based fuzzing loop [9]. Both AFL and LibFuzzer have been extensively enhanced,

with techniques including input corpus distillation [10], taint-guided mutation [11], and concolic execution to solve path constraints [12].

2.3 Structure-Aware Fuzzing

Standard mutation-based fuzzers treat inputs as byte sequences, ignoring any internal structure. This approach is inefficient for highly structured formats like cryptographic ledgers, where random byte mutations are unlikely to produce valid headers or parseable entries [13]. Structure-aware fuzzing addresses this limitation by providing the fuzzer with a grammar or model of the input format [14]. Frameworks such as Peach Fuzzer [15], LibFuzzer's custom mutator API [16], and the Rust `fuzzcheck` crate [17] support structure-aware fuzzing through user-defined mutators that operate on the format's abstract syntax tree.

2.4 Differential Fuzzing

Differential fuzzing compares the behavior of multiple implementations processing the same input, detecting discrepancies that indicate bugs in one or more implementations [18]. McKeeman first formalized this approach for compiler testing [19]. Petsios et al. developed NEZHA, a framework for efficient differential testing that uses input generation to maximize behavioral differences between implementations [20]. Differential fuzzing is particularly valuable for cryptographic software, where different implementations of the same specification should produce identical outputs for all valid inputs [21].

2.5 Fuzzing Cryptographic Software

The cryptographic community has increasingly adopted fuzzing as a security assurance technique. The OpenSSL project maintains a comprehensive fuzz testing infrastructure, with over 50 fuzz targets covering different protocol and format parsers [22]. Bernstein et al. developed the `cryptofuzz` framework, which provides differential fuzzing across multiple cryptographic library implementations [23]. The OSS-Fuzz project, run by Google, provides continuous fuzzing infrastructure for critical open source software, including several cryptographic libraries [24]. The Rust Secure Code Working Group has established guidelines for fuzzing Rust cryptographic code, emphasizing the importance of combining fuzzing with sanitizer tools [25].

3. Technical Analysis

3.1 Fuzzing Target Architecture

The AIOSS fuzzing suite comprises three primary targets:

Target 1: Binary Format Parser

```
fn fuzz_binary_format(data: &[u8]) {
    if data.len() < 16 { return; }
    if data[0..4] == AIOSS_MAGIC {
        if let Ok(ledger) = BinaryFormat::parse(data) {
            validate_invariants(&ledger);
        }
    }
}
```

Target 2: JSON Format Parser

```rust
fn fuzz_json_format(data: &[u8]) {
    if let Ok(json) = serde_json::from_slice::<Value>(data) {
        if let Ok(ledger) = JsonFormat::parse(&json) {
            validate_invariants(&ledger);
        }
    }
}
```

Target 3: Verification Engine

```rust
fn fuzz_verification_engine(data: &[u8]) {
    let (valid_ledger, injection_offset, injection_data) =
        split_fuzz_input(data);
    let mut ledger = valid_ledger.clone();
    ledger.inject_corruption(injection_offset, injection_data);

    let result = ledger.verify_chain_integrity();

    // Verification must not panic, leak memory, or crash
    // Result correctness is checked by differential fuzzing
}
```

3.2 Structure-Aware Mutator

The structure-aware mutator operates on the AIOSS abstract syntax tree:

```rust
struct AiossMutator {
    corpus: Vec<AiossAst>,
    rng: ChaCha12Rng,
}

impl AiossMutator {
    fn mutate(&mut self, ast: &AiossAst) -> AiossAst {
        match self.rng.gen_range(0..8) {
            0 => self.mutate_magic_bytes(ast),
            1 => self.mutate_version_field(ast),
            2 => self.mutate_entry_count(ast),
            3 => self.mutate_hash_value(ast),
            4 => self.mutate_signature(ast),
            5 => self.mutate_state(ast),
            6 => self.mutate_compliance(ast),
            7 => self.mutate_payload(ast),
            _ => unreachable!(),
        }
    }

    fn mutate_state(&self, ast: &AiossAst) -> AiossAst {
        let mut new = ast.clone();
```

```
        if let Some(entry) = new.entries.last_mut() {
            entry.state = match self.rng.gen_range(0..4) {
                0 => State::Open,
                1 => State::Closed,
                2 => State::Finalized,
                _ => State::Delete,
            };
        }
        // Also invalid states (out of range)
        if self.rng.gen_bool(0.1) {
            entry.state = State::from_u8(self.rng.gen());
        }
        new
    }
}
```

This mutator produces inputs that are structurally valid (correct magic bytes, parseable structure) but may violate semantic invariants (illegal state transitions, incorrect hash values).

3.3 Differential Fuzzing Setup

The differential fuzzing framework compares the AIOSS implementation against a formally specified reference:

```
fn differential_fuzz(data: &[u8]) {
    let harness1 = AiossImplementation::harness();
    let harness2 = ReferenceImplementation::harness();

    let result1 = harness1.process(data);
    let result2 = harness2.process(data);

    match (result1, result2) {
        (Ok(r1), Ok(r2)) => {
            assert_eq!(r1.chain_valid, r2.chain_valid,
                "Verification discrepancy");
            assert_eq!(r1.entry_count, r2.entry_count,
                "Entry count discrepancy");
            assert_eq!(r1.state, r2.state,
                "State machine discrepancy");
        }
        (Err(e1), Ok(_)) => {
            // False negative: AIOSS rejects valid input
            log_differential_error("FALSE_NEGATIVE", data, e1);
        }
        (Ok(_), Err(e2)) => {
            // False positive: AIOSS accepts invalid input
            log_differential_error("FALSE_POSITIVE", data, e2);
        }
        (Err(_), Err(_)) => {} // Both reject: expected
```

```
    }
}
```

3.4 Experimental Results

Over 10,000 CPU-hours of fuzzing across three targets:

Target	CPU-hrs	Crashes	Unique Defects	Coverage
Binary format parser	4,000	387	18	67.3%
JSON format parser	3,000	245	14	72.1%
Verification engine	3,000	312	15	58.9%
Total	**10,000**	**944**	**47**	**66.1%**

Vulnerability taxonomy:

Class	Count	Criticality	Examples
Buffer overflow	2	Critical	Unbounded entry count in header
Use-after-free	1	Critical	Drop order in error path
Logic error	12	High	State transition validation
Denial of service	8	High	Hash collision in skip list
Integer overflow	5	Medium	Entry offset calculation
Compliance encoding	24	Low	Invalid flag combinations

The three critical memory safety defects were immediately fixed and the fixes verified through subsequent fuzzing rounds.

4. Current State of the Art

Modern fuzzing frameworks continue to advance rapidly. The Gramatron project demonstrated that grammar-based fuzzing using automata representations could achieve higher coverage than context-free grammars for complex input formats [26]. The Fuzzilli fuzzer targets JavaScript engines through a custom intermediate language, demonstrating the effectiveness of language-specific fuzzing approaches [27]. The Polyglot framework enables cross-format fuzzing, where inputs are constructed that are simultaneously valid in multiple formats [28].

In the Rust ecosystem specifically, the `cargo-fuzz` tool provides seamless integration with LibFuzzer, and the `arbitrary` crate enables automatic derivation of fuzzable input types from Rust data structures [29]. The Rust Fuzz Book provides comprehensive guidance on setting up fuzz targets [30]. The `bolero` framework integrates property-based testing with fuzzing, allowing developers to write test oracles that are automatically converted to fuzz harnesses [31].

For cryptographic systems, the `cryptofuzz` project continues to expand its coverage of cryptographic libraries, including Rust implementations [32]. The `tls-fuzzer` project has discovered numerous vulnerabilities in TLS implementations through systematic protocol-level fuzzing [33].

5. Relevance to AIOSS

The fuzzing results have directly informed AIOSS development in several ways:

1. **Hardened parsers**: The binary and JSON format parsers have been extensively hardened against malformed inputs, using checked arithmetic for all length and offset calculations.
2. **Defensive state machine**: The state transition logic now validates transitions at every entry, rather than only at the ledger level, preventing illegal state sequences within valid-format files.
3. **Boundary testing**: The fuzzer-discovered edge cases have been codified as regression tests, ensuring that previously fixed bugs are not reintroduced.
4. **CI/CD integration**: The AIOSS continuous integration pipeline includes automated fuzz testing on every pull request, with a minimum 24-hour fuzz run before merge approval.
5. **Safety guarantees**: The elimination of memory safety defects from the parsing and verification code enables the project to offer stronger safety guarantees to users, particularly in regulated environments where software correctness is audited.

The fuzzing infrastructure itself has been released as part of the AIOSS repository, enabling community contributions to fuzz target development and fostering a security-conscious development culture.

6. Future Directions

Several important directions for future work emerge. The integration of symbolic execution with fuzzing—combining concrete fuzzing with SMT-solving to systematically explore path conditions—could achieve even higher coverage [34]. The application of machine learning to seed generation, where generative models learn the distribution of valid ledger files and produce seeds likely to exercise edge cases, represents a promising approach [35].

The development of formally verified specifications that can be used as fuzzing oracles—where the fuzzer validates that the implementation matches a formal model—could eliminate false positives from the differential fuzzing approach [36]. The extension of the fuzzing framework to cover the cross-language bindings (Python, Go, JavaScript) would ensure consistent behavior across all supported languages [37].

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